

# Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

## Three Ways to Hike The Perfect Winter Trail at Long Hunter State Park

By Fran Wallas

This hike at Long Hunter State Park in Hermitage is the best on a winter day. The trail is well marked and easy to find even in the snow. The leaves are gone so you get lots of views of J. Percy Priest Lake. Winter is a quieter time with fewer motorboats and less noise on the lake.

The trail starts at the parking lot. You will want to take a trail map from the box at the trailhead. If you are a strong hiker trying to speed up your heart rate, you may choose to go to the campground and back as a 12-mile day hike. If you want to slow down and spend a few days in this beautiful park, you may choose to do an overnight hike. The trail to the campground is an easy six-mile hike. The campsites are tucked beside the lake on a wooded hillside. Water is always available, but you need to purify it. You have to get a free camping permit from the park office before beginning your hike. The camping sites are available on a first come basis.

To really enjoy the beauty of the area, you may want to take the four-mile Day Loop Trail that is part of the longer trail. The hike begins as a wide gravel path. Keep a lookout for the wooden footbridge on your right a little further down the path. The footbridge is the start of the Volunteer Trail/Day Loop Trail. Follow the white blazes. You are rewarded quickly with views of the lake. The dirt path leads through and around

Ordovician limestone outcroppings. These rocks were deposited when Middle Tennessee was a shallow sea. If you look carefully, you may find fossils of marine life. Common fossils found in these formations include brachiopods, bryzoans, gastropods, and occasionally you may even find parts of a trilobite.

In less than a mile you get to the junction of the Volunteer Trail and the Day Loop Trail. Turn left on the Day Loop Trail. The blazes are now orange and really show up on a snowy day. The trail goes through some sinkholes that are typical of karst topography. At about two miles, you get to a bench right at the lake. This is a great spot to watch for migrating birds, read, think, snack, or rest. You will cross some scenic limestone bluffs along the way. The trail begins to curve and follows the side of a cove.

In about 2.5 miles, you get to the junction with the Volunteer Trail. You will see a kiosk and another bench on your left. If you are ready to end your hike, you will go right instead. The trail sign says "Trail Head" with an arrow pointing the way. The trail is now blazed in white since you have rejoined the Volunteer Trail. Watch for an old stone wall that goes right across the path. You will wind through an oak-hickory forest and pass some interesting rock formations. When you get to the Day Loop/Volunteer junction, go straight unless you want to hike the loop all over



April Welch

The Day Use Trail at Long Hunter State Park in Hermitage offers a spot to sit and enjoy nature.

again. Remember to turn left at the gravel path to return to the parking lot.

Are you wondering why this trail is called the Volunteer Trail? This trail exists because scouts, school groups, individuals and organizations volunteered many hours to build this trail. If you are interested in helping to maintain a park trail, please contact the state park office at 615-885-2422.

Limestone outcroppings are seen along the Day Loop Trail at Long Hunter State Park in Hermitage.



Fran Wallas

### Directions

Directions to Long Hunter State Park Trailhead: Take I-40 to the Mount Juliet Exit/Highway 171. Follow Highway 171 south toward Long Hunter State Park - almost six miles - to a small sign for Bakers Grove "Volunteer Trail." Turn right and go a very short distance to the end of the road. Turn left and the road dead ends at the parking lot.

#### Long Hunter State Park



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville.)